

WEBER THOMPSON



MEETING MINUTES

TODAY'S DATE:	090813	MEETING #:	Workshop #6		
PROJECT NAME:	SLU Urban Design Framework	MEETING DATE:	090813		
		PROJECT #:	09-016	SERVICE:	C / UD
SUBJECT:	Prototype Blocks				
LOCATION:	Weber Thompson, 225 Terry Ave N. CR #4				
ATTENDING:	CLIENT NAME	COMPANY NAME		INITIALS	
	Marshall Foster	City of Seattle, OPM		MF	
	Jim Holmes	City of Seattle, DPD		JH	
	Darby Watson	City of Seattle, SDOT		DW	
	Catherine Cornwall	City of Seattle, DPD		CC	
	Jackie Smith	City of Seattle, SCL		JS	
	Ray Gastil	City of Seattle, DPD		RG	
	Lyle Bicknell	City of Seattle, DPD		LB	
	Jeff Wendlandt	City of Seattle, DPD		JW	
	Dan Foltz	Weber Thompson		DF	
	Catherine Benotto	Weber Thompson		CB	
	Brian Steinburg	Weber Thompson		BS	
	Peter Greaves	Weber Thompson		PG	
	Myer Harrell	Weber Thompson		MH	
	Gabe Hanson	Weber Thompson		GH	
	John Savo	NBBJ		JS	
	Mahlon Clements	Bumgardner		MC	
	Matt Roewe	Via Architects		MR	
	John Pearson	LUOA		JP	
	Lloyd Douglass	CNC		LD	

Sharon Coleman	Vulcan	SC
Ron Turner		RT

Introduction

Purpose of Workshop #6:

1. Provide guidance to future charette teams so that they can study in more detail
2. Provide guidance to the City of Seattle for the SLU EIS and revisions to the neighborhood plan, design guidelines, etc.

Goals of Workshop #6:

1. Discuss prototype blocks comparing current zoning and conceptual zoning.
2. Discuss proposed and constructed case studies.
3. Discuss trade-offs between zoning height, FAR, building form and neighborhood / SLU UDF goals.
4. Identify strategies, make recommendations to balance neighborhood goals and development rights.
5. Identify location / use specific strategies and goals.

Structure of Workshop #6:

1. 8:30 - 8:45 - Welcome / Introduction
2. 8:45 - 10:00 - Current Zoning and Prototype blocks
 - a. Explanation, restrictions and constraints of existing zoning, reason for addressing zoning changes
 - b. Development opportunities and typ. block sizes in SLU
 - c. Urban form and UDF / neighborhood goals
 - d. Prototype Block Typologies: Demonstration and Discussion of existing zoning and assumptions of conceptual zoning changes
3. 10:00 – 12:15 – Brainstorm / Charette Considerations affecting urban form
 - a. Base heights
 - b. Townhouse / At-grade housing development
 - c. Above Grade Parking
 - d. Base / Tower relationship
 - e. Tower Locations and Spacing
4. 12:15 – 12:30 – Wrap

Group Discussion

Core Theme of the Day: Flexibility

1. Codes should encourage design flexibility to respond to unique site conditions and opportunities, and avoid prescriptive or blanket form responses.

- a. A more prescriptive approach is appropriate where a specific form or use or frontage is desired or required. (Maybe 8th Avenue? Retail frontages? Ground-related housing, responses to key public views, etc)
- b. Design Guidelines should be updated so that guidance is given for specific design goals of the UDF. Enough detail should be given so that the intent is clear, but enough flexibility should be given to allow the design team to interpret the correct response for their site.
- c. Let developer, architect and design review board work together to develop a project that works and is responsive to the neighborhood
- d. Execution of incentivized goals should have options (payment in lieu or providing on-site open space)

Presentations

1. Current Zoning and Prototype blocks

- a. Explanation, restrictions and constraints of existing zoning, reason for addressing zoning changes
- b. Development opportunities and typ. block sizes in SLU
 - i. Brian Steinburg updated the group on the development opportunities map
 - ii. Discussed actual block sizes in the neighborhood.
 - Typical E-W ½ block sizes include 120', 115', 112', 108', 100'
 - Typical N-S blocks = 360'
 - Discussed challenges of above (and below) grade parking for towers in blocks that are smaller
 - Office will have trouble with thinner blocks due to the need for larger cores.
 - Residential shear core towers will have trouble parking in less than 108'.
 - Possible subgrade vacation at alley or sidewalk could help alleviate this.
 - Need to allow for street trees...thus limited to the walking zone of the sidewalk (6' from the property line) and to a depth that significant (i.e. large canopy) street trees may be planted.
 - Vacation policies should be simplified
- c. Urban form and UDF / neighborhood goals
 - i. What are neighborhood goals that affect urban form?
 - Residential oriented open space
 - Commercial urban plazas
 - Identified View corridors / opportunities
 - Thomas / John = Space Needle
 - Westlake / Boren / Fairview = Lake Union
 - Westlake = can't see lake until the northernmost blocks
 - Boren = topography allows great views from John to Valley, current and future development will reduce the views.
 - Fairview = long views to lake from middle of street, but mature tree canopy prevent sidewalk pedestrian views
 - Appropriate proportion of street wall to street width, forming the urban room.
 - What is appropriate? What makes a good urban room?

- Subjective.
- Leave flexible through design review.
- Other elements are equally important
 - Specify street trees with actual canopy to create sense of enclosure, but also a filter to intense sun.
- Integration of civic infrastructure with private development (Public- Private development).
- Sustainability
 - LEED not enough...need LEED + Performance goals
 - Identify and incentivize (with additional height or FAR) targets and parameters to meet and maintain performance
 - Include human scale elements like...
 - relationship to operable windows for inhabitants (min. distance, or ability to control fresh air)
 - Additional height for natural light penetration
 - Let Light and Air be shapers of building form, like pre-1950's code buildings inherently were. Buildings will be shaped by energy codes to achieve higher performance; zoning should be similarly "performance-based" to accommodate that.
 - Performance based codes should be specific about targets for ventilation, natural light, water use and treatment, etc. They should be simple and measureable. Also, need mechanism for long term maintenance / performance past initial approval.
 - Tenant Agreements sometimes preclude efficiency
 - Spec office spaces
 - 1st cost of energy reduction is not incentivized or...
 - Savings in energy now goes to the tenant, structured in tenant agreements
 - Operating costs are lower, but may not be enough to offset 1st cost
 - Is there a way to share the savings so that both the owner and tenant are incentivized to work together or challenge each other to reduce, reuse, recycle?
 - Need to incentivize future Terry Thomas buildings.
 - District strategies should be planned and implemented, don't let the daunting nature of these plans be an excuse for inaction. Think of these like sewers, that can be updated, repaired, or installed over time.
 - "starter" projects can lay the foundation, work with largest landowners with largest contiguous holdings
 - Vulcan
 - Seattle Times
 - District energy, heating
- Townhouse / At-grade housing development
 - Traditional townhouses are 3-5 stories tall, with back yards, and front stoops, a true house in the town.
 - Today's townhomes are typically 3 stories and attached to larger structures, thus no back yard which makes them very expensive and not responsive to family living.

- Focus should be on “ground related” housing which could be affordable, stacked flats, not townhomes which tend to be expensive.
 - First floor housing could be at grade, but if so, should have high ceilings like retail (i.e. 13’ minimum) to allow deep light penetration. At grade housing should have a distinct buffer from the sidewalk for privacy reasons which may need to be deeper than raised stoop development. This would allow future conversion to retail or other uses.
 - Stoop housing is typically raised 3-5’ from the street level and may require some use of street ROW on some thinner parcels of land.
- Live/Work has not been a successful development because it is a “tweener”, neither a successful place to live or to work.
- Need critical mass of ground-related housing to make it work and create a special street character.
- Greenstreets
 - Upper level setbacks like in other neighborhoods?
 - If required, leave flexible through design review.
 - Growing Vine Street type rainwater management

2. Prototype Block Typologies: Demonstration and Discussion of existing zoning and assumptions of conceptual zoning changes

- a. Conceptual Zoning Assumptions for the graphics presented
 - i. Residential
 - 240’ ht. maximum
 - FAR 5; up to 7 with bonuses
 - Max. floorplate size = 10,500 sf average
 - ii. Commercial
 - 160’ ht. maximum
 - FAR 5; up to 7 with bonuses
 - Max. floorplate size = 35,000 sf
- b. Issues
 - i. Minimum lot sizes for tower development = 22,000 sf
 - 22,000 sf is larger than ¼ block
 - Is it cumulative, i.e. disallows 2 towers on same ½ block if a single owner owns the land?
 - It was felt that tower spacing was a much better tool than min. lot size
 - ii. Tower floor plate size
 - Is it better to have 2 8000 sf floorplates or 1 16,000 sf floorplate (like Cristalla) as far as urban form goes?
 - 10,500 sf floorplate allows for greater unit diversity and mix.
 - Smaller floorplates have less efficiency and thus less ability to attract non-luxury buyers.
 - Local codes restrict use of scissor stairs, thus requiring larger cores, and less ability to build smaller floorplates.
 - Averaging floorplates creates visual interest, and ability to sculpt the tower.
 - iii. Incentive strategies for open space may include...
 - TDR (on site)

- Allow for a shift of sf from one portion of a site to another, even exceeding zoning FAR or height in order to provide at grade, publicly accessible open space, or preserve historic buildings.
- TDR (off site)
 - Allow for development rights to be transferred from an off-site location in order to preserve historic buildings or provide a “receiving site” for open space. This TDR could be added to a site in excess of FAR and/or height.
- Require FAR for residential as well as commercial
 - Incentivizes open space incorporation to larger projects.
- Pay in lieu – but payments must be reserved for use in specific neighborhood boundary.
- iv. True mixed use projects (residential and commercial on one site)
 - Incentivize open space equitably?
 - Singular FAR for the project so open space is still incentivized.
- v. Mechanical Screen Height
 - Downtown zoning allows 10% of height for mechanical screen (10% of 400 = 40'). With smaller (10,700 sf) floorplate profile, this allows elevator penthouses, and mechanical spaces to be stacked to accommodate rooftop residential amenity space while providing visual interest at the top of the building. Shorter towers have the same or very similar needs, but 10% may not provide enough height to screen the mechanical equipment as the elevator overrun alone could be 24-27' high.

3. Brainstorm / Charette Considerations affecting urban form

- a. Base heights
 - i. Are there different required heights based on location? Are these...
 - Related to street width?
 - There was acknowledgement that the relationship between street width and street wall height was important, and should be illustrated in the guidelines, but an exact ratio or relationship definition was deemed undesirable and restrictive.
 - Design guidelines may want to refer to how the project reinforces the public realm or “urban room” for the Design Review board to review.
 - Some key streets may warrant more attention for desired effect, Mercer, Dexter, Westlake, Fairview.
 - Related to adjacent structures?
 - A singular building or base height for the neighborhood is not desired, and the visual interest of base heights reflecting the building’s use and needs will most likely lead to various base heights.
 - This should be tempered within reason and relation to the urban room.
 - It is a goal, especially in tower projects, to emphasize the height and slenderness of the tower by reducing the height of the base (i.e. squeezing the tube of toothpaste”) as a tradeoff
 - Setbacks
 - Views
 - The goal of this study is not to preserve private views, but there are some opportunities to enhance an existing or proposed public view corridor, like Boren Avenue.

- However, some view corridors as discussed above aren't affected by the buildings as much as the tree canopy (Westlake and Fairview)
 - Sun exposure
 - It was discussed that trying to ensure solar exposure through zoning is nearly impossible.
 - Green Streets
 - Green Street setbacks are common in the Denny Triangle, but for small site projects, the setbacks provide problematic challenges to construction or project viability.
- ii. Commercial
 - Related to size of site?
- iii. Residential
 - 65' allows 4 floors above grade parking
 - Related to size of site?
- b. Above Grade Parking
 - i. What's required?
 - Will there be a maximum parking limit?
 - For parking provided, will there be a maximum amount above grade? Will it relate to the Downtown zoning which allows up to 4 levels above grade but only if an equal amount is provided below grade?
 - Should commercial be limited to below grade parking?
 - Water table issues should be addressed.
 - ii. How does size of site affect?
 - To accommodate towers or larger projects on small site widths (below 108') the city may want to allow below grade ROW (sidewalk) vacation out to the furthest extent of the "pedestrian pathway" along the sidewalk. This will allow street trees and plantings to remain or be planted. Vacation policies need to be relaxed to make this easier to achieve.
 - Narrow sites affect ability to park and screen parking. 108' quarter block site width is very challenging to park a tower project with the ability to screen the exposed parking.
 - Small sites or small projects are more likely to park all below grade.
 - Medium size (quarter to half block) tower projects are most likely to need the most above grade parking, due to narrow site, ramping, and number of stalls required.
 - Full block sites that achieve a below grade alley vacation can park the most efficiently below grade, but may require some above grade based on the project and location. Vacation policies need to be relaxed to make this easier to achieve.
 - Should less above grade parking be allowed for full block sites?
 - iii. Masking above grade parking
 - Should full block developments be limited to less above grade parking?
 - SLU should adopt similar provisions for "active use" facades to mask parking.
 - iv. Treating Service entries
 - Alleys were discussed as forgotten spaces in the public realm, and should be treated as active, safe, comfortable spaces to inhabit, not just back of house service corridors.
 - Examples of eased corners and retail wrapping alley entrances were provided.

- Melbourne has recreated alleys as active use corridors that still provide access and service, as well as retail, spill out café spaces, galleries, graffiti art as public art, etc.
- Well designed / proportioned alley facades should be required in the design guidelines.
- c. Base / Tower relationship
 - i. Wedding cake
 - Arbitrary setbacks for towers restricts creative solutions, makes structure difficult to line up and thus expensive, and parking hard to accommodate.
 - No consistent line from top to bottom ends up foreshortening the tower, making it look like a stumpy tower on a base.
 - ii. Integrated tower and base
 - An integrated tower extends line or forms through the base so that the two have a compositional relationship, but not all the way to the ground
 - Longer lines, make the tower look thinner
 - iii. Tower expressed to ground (or close to ground)
 - Longer lines, make the tower look thinner
 - No preference was shown in order to leave the “best solution” up to the design team.
- d. Tower Locations and Spacing
 - i. How best to site towers – relationship to overall topography, lakefront, landmarks, other considerations
 - ii. What is minimum tower spacing requirement?
 - Intrablock spacing (within block)
 - Limits # of towers per block
 - First come first allowed.
 - Interblock spacing (outside block)
 - Spacing from towers on adjacent blocks or center of street.
 - Could limit # of towers on adjacent blocks
 - iii. Impact of shade and shadow
 - Some cities have distinct and detailed studies of tower spacing impact on shade and shadow.
 - Important to base spacing requirement on quantitative analysis as well as qualitative analysis.
- e. Open Space Plan
 - i. An open space plan to identify neighborhood need and desire was completed, but no plan for location or strategy has been.
 - ii. Should there be a “reception site” plan for incentive dollars that can be agreed upon
 - iii. Prioritize public assets that are more achievable, like street parks, green streets, small pocket parks.
 - iv. Should internal open space be de-incentivized? 5% of residential sf requirement often requires a huge amount of amenity which is expensive to provide. If this is reduced, the savings could go towards community amenities instead of private ones.
 - v. Incentivize residential projects to provide for residential need (i.e. playgrounds, pocket parks, athletic activity, dog runs, and community gardens).
 - vi. Prioritize ground level open space, both public and semi-private.
 - vii. Need to ensure minimum sizes for meaningful open space.
- f. Future of building form
 - i. What kind of commercial buildings will be built?

- Seeing shift to larger floorplates, so businesses can be internally connected on a single floor
- Sustainability is driving thinner profile floorplates to encourage natural lighting and cross ventilation to reduce energy consumption.
- ii. Design Guidelines and SM zoning
 - SLU design guidelines are out of date
 - Built in flexibility for SM zoning requires less departures than NC3 zone
 - Street level interest cannot rely on retail, must be other uses, or adaptable spaces that have a good relationship to the street. This may be accommodated through street level public or semi-private amenities.
- iii. Carbon Footprint
 - Big ideas discussed during the SLU process have included shifting alleys to E-W orientation to address solar access and reduction of energy use.
 - While this may be challenging or impossible politically or legally (since the multitude of owners would have to agree on the reconfiguration), the goal may want to be addressed, specifically for larger consolidated block projects where a single owner has flexibility to position buildings, or parts of a single building to maximize the southern exposure, and limit the harsh and hard to control Western sun.
 - Possibly spanning over alleys to achieve E-W orientation should be studied. Would require above grade alley vacation.
 - Could provide 30-40% energy savings.